

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 05080 311529Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 ACDA-12 SAA-01

SES-02 SSM-03 HA-05 MCT-02 /086 W

-----045587 311540Z /50

O R 311444Z AUG 78

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9492

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5080

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, MILI, LE, SY

SUBJECT: NORTH LEBANON STILL TENSE

REF: BEIRUT 5048

1. SUMMARY. THE SITUATION IN NORTH LEBANON IS STILL TENSE AS SYRIAN TROOPS REMAIN ALONG THE CEDARS ROAD. THE LEADERS OF THE TOWN OF BSHARRI HAVE FORMED A SEVEN-MAN JOINT DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND THREATENED TO FIGHT THE SYRIANS. IF THE SYRIANS DO NOT MAKE WHAT THE CHRISTIANS CONSIDER TO BE SOME MEANINGFUL CONCESSION SUCH AS WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS FROM THE CEDARS ROAD, MORE FIGHTING CAN BE EXPECTED. IN ADDITION, THE FIGHTING IN NORTH LEBANON HAS ENDED THE APPARENT RECONCILIATION BETWEEN BSHARRI AND SULAYMAN FRANJIYAH'S HOMETOWN OF ZGHARTA. END SUMMARY.

2. SITUATION STILL TENSE. THE SITUATION IN NORTH LEBANON IS STILL TENSE. ALTHOUGH SYRIAN TROOPS HAVE WITHDRAWN FROM THE TOWN OF THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 05080 311529Z

CEDARS THEY REMAIN IN BSHARRI AND ALONG THE CEDARS ROAD BETWEEN BSHARRI AND DAYR AL AHMAR. TWO MORE BODIES OF PEOPLE KILLED BY THE SYRIANS HAVE BEEN FOUND IN THE AREA, ACCORDING TO PRESS AND OTHER SOURCES. (SIX PEOPLE FROM BSHARRI WERE FOUND DEAD IN THE CEDARS ON AUGUST 28. SEE REFTTEL.) THE SYRIANS COMMANDER FOR NORTH LEBANON, ALI DIB, STILL REMAINS IN HIS POST, DESPITE REPORTS THAT THE SYRIAN COMMANDER FOR LEBANON, ALI ASLAN, HAD DISMISSED HIM. (DIB

REPORTSSS DIRECTLY TO RIFAT AL ASSAD, THE BROTHER OF SYRIAN PRESIDENT HAFIZ AL ASSAD, AND MAY BE ABLE TO IGNORE ASLAN'S ORDERS.)

3. DEFENSE COMMITTEE FORMED.

A. MEANWHILE, THE LEADERS OF THE TOWN OF BSHARRI ON AUGUST 30 FORMED A SEVEN-MAN JOINT "DEFENSE COMMITTEE" WHICH INCLUDES TWO MEMBERS OF THE PHALANGE PARTY AND TWO MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY. ACCORDING TO THE PHALANGE NEWSPAPER AL AMAL ON AUGUST 31, THE COMMITTEE HAS TAKEN HEAVY WEAPONS OUT OF STORAGE AND SET UP GUNS ON HILLTOPS IN PREPARATION FOR A CONFRONTATION WITH THE SYRIANS. THE DEFENSE COMMITTEE ISSUED A STRONGLY WORDED STATEMENT WHICH -- WARNED AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO DISARM THE CHRISTIANS "PREPARATORY TO HUMILIATING AND DISPERSING THEM"; -- EMPHASIZING THAT BSHARRI IS A "CENTER OF CHRISTIANITY" AND THAT THE TIME HAS COME FOR BSHARRI TO "JOIN THE SILENT CHRISTIAN MAJORITY IN ITS UP-RISING;" -- EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT PRESIDENT SARKIS AND ADF COMMANDER SAMI KHATIB HAD ISSUED THE ORDERS FOR THE SYRIAN TROOPS TO CARRY OUT THE FIGHTING IN THE NORTH; -- DEMANDED THAT THE SYRIANS BE REPLACED BY LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES AND THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MASSACRE BE PUNISHED.

B. CAMILLE CHAMOUN IN A STATEMENT WHICH WAS ANNOUNCED BY BANNER HEADLINES IN THE NLP DAILY AL AHRAR SAID THAT HE AND HIS PARTY WERE READY TO JOIN THE PEOPLE OF BSHARRI IN SEEKING VENGEANCE FOR THE MURDERED PEOPLE.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 05080 311529Z

4. BSHARRI'S VERSION OF EVENTS.

A. THE STATEMENT OF THE BSHARRI DEFENSE COMMITTEE ALSO SET FORTH THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCE OF EVENTS: -- "ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 24-25, AN ADF FORCE ENTERED THE TOWNS OF DAYR AL AHMAR AND AYN ATA AND THE VILLAGES SURROUNDING THEM, MOST OF WHOSE INHABITANTS ARE BSHARRI FAMILIES. THE FORCE STRIPPED THOSE VILLAGES OF THEIR ARMS AND THEN CONTINUED ITS ADVANCE TOWARD THE CEDARS-BSHARRI AREA, LEAVING ROADBLOCKS ALONG THE MOUNTAIN ROAD WHICH CONNECTS THE BIQA AND THE NORTH. -- "ON MONDAY MORNING (AUGUST 28), A LARGE PART OF THIS FORCE APPROACHED THE CEDARS CHALETS. SOME OF THEM SURROUNDED THE ARMY BARRACKS AND GENDARME STATION WHILE THE OTHERS ENTERED THE CHALETS. . . GATHERED UP EVERYTHING THEY COULD LAY THEIR HANDS ON AND LEFT, TAKING WITH THEM SIX PEACEABLE CITIZENS, INCLUDING THE TWO NEPHEWS OF DEPUTY SHIEKH HABIB KAIROUZ. -- "THE BODIES OF ALL SIX WERE FOUND THE NEXT MORNING THROWN NEAR THE ARMY BARRACKS, HORRIBLY MUTILATED, DESPITE THE FACT THAT HAD THEY BEEN QUESTIONED, IT WOULD HAVE BECOME IMMEDIATELY CLEAR THAT THEY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ANY PARTY OR ORGANIZATION."

5. COMMENTS:

A. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE STATEMENTS OF THE BSHARRI DEFENSE COMMITTEE CAN BE TAKEN AS IDLE THREATS. IF THE SYRIANS DO NOT MAKE WHAT THE CHRISTIANS CONSIDER TO BE SOME MEANINGFUL CONCESSIONS IN THE NORTH, SUCH AS THE DISMISSAL OF ALI DIB OR THE WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS FROM THE CEDARS ROAD, MORE FIGHTING CAN BE EXPECTED.

B. AT THE SAME TIME, THE RECENT TURN OF EVENTS COULD: - SPELL TROUBLE FOR FORMER PRESIDENT SULAYMAN FRANJIYAH, WHO IS CLOSE TO THE SYRIANS; -- REVIVE THE TRADITIONAL RIVALRY BETWEEN FRANJIYAH'S HOMETOWN OF ZGHARTA AND BSHARRI. WHEN PHALANGE MILITIAMEN KILLED TONY FRANJIYAH IN JUNE, BSHARRI LEADERS WERE QUICK TO GO TO ZGHARTA AND ASSURE SULAYMAN FRANJIYAH THAT THEY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE MURDER. THIS HAD BROUGHT ABOUT A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE TWO
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BEIRUT 05080 311529Z

TOWNS. BSHARRI'S PRESENT EVIDENT HOSTILITY TOWARD THE SYRIANS HAS PROBABLY ENDED THIS RECONCILIATION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT05080
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780356-0223
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978081/aaaaaamr.tel
Line Count: 139
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3cad8457-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 BEIRUT 5048
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1536413
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NORTH LEBANON STILL TENSE
TAGS: PINT, PINS, MILI, LE, SY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3cad8457-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014